



Grover G. Norquist

President

April 28, 2003

The Honorable

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On Wednesday April 30, 2003 the House will consider H.R. 1350, the Improving Education Results for Children With Disabilities Act of 2003. During the debate, Representative Jim DeMint will offer an important amendment that expands educational choice for parents of disabled students. I am writing to urge you to support the amendment.

As you know, one of the most pressing issues facing local school districts is the financial burden of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). School districts are saddled with the cost of this unfunded mandate - at the expense of both children with and without disabilities.

H.R. 1350 eliminates several of these tribulations by improving education results for children with special needs by shifting the focus away from compliance with duplicative, burdensome, and confusing rules, and placing a renewed emphasis on ensuring that children with disabilities are learning.

However, the legislation does not include one key component of improving education for disabled students — parental choice. IDEA funds should be available for parents to choose services or schools for their children, particularly for parents whose children are trapped in schools that can not meet their special academic and/or physical needs. The amendment offered by Representative DeMint allow for this choice.

The amendment offered by Representative DeMint allows Part D, research and innovation dollars, to be voluntarily used by states to research and develop new education systems that promote customization and choice. In addition, it amends Part B to allow states that already provide parental choice programs to let their federal money follow the child along with the state money to their selected school. Currently, states that allow parents to use local and state special education funds to access community-based resources, such as a school for autistic children, are limited in their use of federal IDEA funds to supplement the expense to the parent.

The passage of the amendment will expand the educational options for parents with disabled students and work toward the ultimate goal of providing school choice to all parents and students.

Sincerely;

Grover G. Norquist